Preview of Power: Force vs. Vulnerability webinar, May 19, 2020

I'm delighted that I will be doing a workshop entitled Power: Force vs. Vulnerability on May 19th for your chapter. I thought it might be useful to share an idea that plays an important role in understanding some of the elements that have led us to see power in the container of force.

In 2017, Hugo Mercier and Dan Sperber published a book entitled The Enigma of Reason. In it, they examined and developed a new understanding of what we call Confirmation Bias. This bias is illustrated when someone rejects peer reviewed scientific studies (or any other verifiable facts) because they do not comport with one of their closely held beliefs and they accept information from dubious sources when they do support those beliefs. We see this in many areas of our culture, seemingly in increasing levels.

Confirmation bias was discovered at Stamford University in 1975 and since then all of the literature has viewed it as a failure of the rational mind. We tell ourselves that reason is what sets us apart from other mammals; we can take in information, objectively evaluate it and make good decisions. Mercier and Sperber turn that assumption on its head. They demonstrate that the purpose of reason is not to make objective decisions but rather to win arguments. Winning arguments, they contend was essential in enforcing the increasing levels of cooperation that was required to maintain the complexities of human societies. In the hunter/gather period we had to convince everyone to go on the hunt. These days we need to enforce cooperation in everything from stopping at red lights to filing our income taxes.

Winning arguments is based on the idea of "I'm right and you are wrong". As a society we back up that assertion with a range of enforcement strategies; everything from socially ostracizing someone to taking away their liberty. Force comes in many different forms. But we can also see that force is two dimensional. It requires that those exerting the force embrace the "rightness" of their position and reject anything that would cause anyone (including themselves) to ask a question or be skeptical.

We have obviously come up with a number of strategies to mitigate this aspect of the rational mind; everything from the scientific method to the use of empathy. But we continue to struggle with the sense that what we think is the highest form of the human experience. I'd like to share with you an approach that I've used in training sessions as well and community groups. In order to demonstrate it I will need five volunteers – 1 person with a recent dream that they have written down and 4 people who will work on the dream in a group. If you'd like to volunteer, please send an email to http://icfmdchapter@gmail.com.

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